

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM WASHINGTON REPORT

STATION WBAI

DATE February 21, 1972 6 PM

CITY New York

INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR MARCHETTE, FORMER CIA AGENT

VICTOR MARCHETTE: There are a lot of things, that led me to leave the agency. For one thing, I felt that the times were changing, greatly, not only in this country but internationally. And that the agency was not keeping pace with it; that the agency was, like the government in general was trying to turn back the cultural clock; trying to live in an era that was long gone, or going fast. Like the cold war, the American imperium ...

(VOICE CONTINUES UNDER FOLLOWING NARRATION)

VOICE: Victor Marchette is probably the highest ranking CIA official ever to resign and publicly criticize the agency. Marchette chose as his format, fiction. His novel, THE ROPE DANCER, except for the adventures of a high-ranking CIA agent who goes to work for the Soviet Union, presents a realistic portrait of life at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

Marchette has been willing to talk with reporters, and is working on a second critique of the CIA, which will be non-fiction.

MARCHETTE: Viet Nam was a big issue in my mind. The CIA was deeply involved there, and in Laos, in Southeast Asia in general. And on one hand, the analysts and CIA would be pointing out that this was a lost cause; that the United States government and, certainly, the CIA, shouldn't have anything to do with it. And yet, the agency would march right along with new operations; getting in deeper and deeper with their Phoenix Programs and pacification programs; private war up there in Laos, and everything.

All these things were eating at me. And I also felt that the agency had gotten too big; too bureaucratic; that it was time for it to change many of its ways; to become much smaller in its clandestine activities. And much more restricted

-2-

in what it did. That is, that it should concern itself exclusively with the collection of information that is important to the United States government and that cannot be acquired other ways.

Other - Rather than fomenting revolutions and coup d'etats and things like this.

VOICE: At one point, your prota gonist comments that -- in the novel -- what are we doing making policy. I thought we were supposed to be collecting information to let the elected officials make policy. Is that you talking?

MARCHETTE: Not only I. I think many of the people in the agency sometimes wonder if the agency isn't getting involved in policy making in a kind of an indirect sort of way. The agency prides itself on being a service organization. And this is its favorite excuse whenever it's cornered in Congress or anywhere else about its activities. Something, someplace. They'll always point to the fact that they were carrying out Presidential orders.

All right, that's true. They, on major issues of course, they would never launch a Bay of Pigs invasion, without White House approval, and authority. Or they would never involve themselves in a war in Laos as they have without the proper authority. But the -- it isn't quite that simple. These things sometimes grow. Like, Laos is a good example of something that's grown since 19 -- actually, it was the late '50's. But in the early '60's where the CIA kept getting involved with governments. They're trying to prop up one government; Souvanna Phouma, while people like Kong Lee were kicking up their heels and carrying out palace revolts. Well, the agency was constantly supporting them. Well, they would, of course, report back to Washington, and say, "This is what we think the situation is; and this is what we think needs to be done."

And then someone would say, "Go ahead and do it." Well when it hits the fan, then they always point to what we were told to do it. They don't point to the fact that they had some hand in creating the situation, or that they in some way, helped to influence the policy makers' decision by the kind of information they presented to them, and the manner in which they presented it to him.

VOICE: What jobs did you hold at the CIA?

MARCHETTE: Well, I spent some time in operations, and I did some research. And I worked on current intelligence and national estimates, and most of the time I was a Soviet

-3-

military specialist. And in the last few years, I was with the agency, I was moved up to the executive suite where I functioned as a staff officer; first as an assistant to the man in charge of planning and programming. And then as the assistant to the number three man; the executive director, and the executive assistant to the number two man the deputy director.

That's where I got the big picture. Because the agency is compartmented. And one usually doesn't know too much about the agency outside of its own -- his own area, or the areas in which he has previously worked. Up in the executive suite, however, you get a big, overall view of the agency, as well as the intelligence community in general.

VOICE: Richard Barnett wrote a recent article in the NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS suggesting that, although the CIA is creating the impression that it's getting out of the dirty tricks business; clandestine operations and so forth; in fact it isn't. Do you share that estimate, and secondly, do you think it's realistic of the CIA's critics to ask that it get out of the clandestine business altogether?

MARCHETTE: I do share Mr. Barnett's view that the agency is trying to project something of a false image, when it implies that it's getting out of the dirty tricks business.

In the first place, this is the -- almost the entire reason for CIA's existence today.

VOICE: Dirty tricks.

MARCHETTE: Yes. The -- about two-thirds of the agency's personnel and funds go for clandestine activities, directly or indirectly. This is the area of collecting information on the enemy, through secret means. This is classical espionage. It's the counter-espionage business. And it's the covered action business, which includes everything from penetrating student organizations and labor unions, to producing propaganda; carrying on psychological warfare, and all the way over to para-military activities.

Now, if you look at the agency's record over the years, particularly in the last ten years, you will see that their contribution to intelligence has been in the operational field. One must remember that the agency is actually -- the CIA is only a small part of the U. S. Intelligence community; roughly about 15 per cent of the whole intelligence community.

Now, the rest of the community is basically concerned with collection of information through technical means and other

-4-

less spooky means. And through the analysis of this information. So the CIA's contribution in this field is not great. In fact, they've been getting - taking some criticism of late for their inability to estimate things correctly. To provide information rapidly enough on big problems. This is one of the reasons why the President said -- He carried out this little re-organization in intelligence late last year.

Well, their big contribution has been - has always been in the clandestine side of the house, and usually in the form of action, as opposed to acquiring information. They don't acquire all that much information. And they're not all that good in counter-espionage. Their big contribution has been influencing events around the world in a variety of means; whether it's an invasion, as in the Bay of Pigs, or one that was successful in Guatemala or Coup d'Etat that Kim (?) Roosevelt carried out in Iran in '53, I guess it was. Or whether it's propping up a regime, as they did in the Congo, against say Soviet efforts to bring on Gizenga, or before that Lumumba. It's in tracking down Che Guevara in Bolivia. It's creating student groups and labor movements that can battle the Soviet front organizations in Europe, or Communist organizations in the Far East. It's creating Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty, that can put out the right kind of propaganda. It's developing airlines, like Air America that you can use, you know, to carry out a para-military action.

This is where the CIA has always made its contribution. This is why Presidents support it. This is why Congressmen protect it. Because it is the secret action arm of the United States government, particularly of the White House; of the President, and it can do a lot of things. And a lot of these things that Presidents and other government leaders find very useful.

Now, I have trouble believing that the CIA is going to sit back and say, "Oh well, you know, we've had some big failures in this field. And a lot of our operations have been exposed. So we're just going to pack up, and quit. You know, it's all over. We're just going to say, 'that's the end of it.'"

These men have spent their entire lives in intelligence. It's from OSS, all these years now. I think what's happening is, and this gets on to the second point, because I think what's happening now, is that the CIA is in a period of retrenchment. It's now trying to re-define its goals. And the methods by which to pursue these goals. And I believe the CIA is now going to become increasingly less noticable in the press. It's going to be --- and when you do see it, it's going to be presenting

-5-

its clean image. The overt side of the agency; the analytical side. But all the while, it's going to be becoming much better covered. It's going to be much more sophisticated and professional in their approach. And I think they're going to be much more devious and much more difficult to direct and control than they've ever been.

You're going to have, instead of a big, you know, semi-overt type operation, as you have in Laos, or something; these are just too big. They're too big for the CIA to run; they're too big for the government to plausibly deny. And the CIA is going to say, "From now on, what we'll do is, we'll try and get through to the right people in a government, and influence things in a more subtle fashion, and in a more indirect way, to achieve the goals of the government."

First of all, it won't be as noticable. Secondly, should we get caught in the act, the government can deny it. You know it will just be -- it just won't be standing out there for everybody to see and take pictures of, as you can in Laos, of all those planes and all those guys, and every --

VOICE: We're talking with Victor Marchette, who's the author of THE ROPE DANCER. A novel about an organization very much like the CIA. And Mr. Marchette is a former high-ranking official of the CIA. Is the capacity of the CIA and the ability of the CIA to indulge in this kind of manipulation especially in the third world, in your opinion, one of the things which has gotten the United States over-committed? In other words, there seems to be an unwritten rule here, that if something can be manipulated, it should be manipulated.

MARCHETTE: No -- Well, I guess they feed off of each other. No, I think the CIA was simply a manifestation of the general attitude that existed in the government after World War II. That it was our responsibility to save the world, and to promote Democracy or our - excuse me - our idea of Democracy and freedom. And that we would do this in whatever way we could.

We'd do it diplomatically. Use our military strength, when necessary. And use the CIA. Obviously, once something like this gets going, then when you do have a bit of a problem in some country where you might be normally -- say, "Well, let's just forget it. Let nature take its course." If the guy knocks at the door. It's the CIA man, and says, "Hey I have an idea on how we can fix that." Well, there the temptation is there.

-6-

VOICE: Well, what would happen if all of this pulled in its horns, and let's say in the third world, the United States, by and large ceased intervening, by covert means?

MARCHETTE: Well, for one thing, I think the prestige of the United States would begin to rise in the minds of the peoples of these countries. They would say, "Well at least they're not mucking about in our affairs."

Then if the United States began to preach some of the things -- or practice some of the things it preaches about democracy, and withdrew some support, say, for a dictator in some country who didn't immediately panic when some socialist revolutionary wants to take over some Latin American country and come in with land reform, as they did in Guatemala; I think maybe people would say, "Well the United States really does have something to offer. They are setting a good example."

I want to make one point kind of clear. And that is, that I do think we need a secret intelligence. Because, you know, we are people. And there's - And some of us aren't as good as others. And there is competition between nations, and they do not always want to deal openly with each other. So there is a certain amount of espionage that is probably necessary because of the human element.

What I'm saying is this: Fine, that should be kept to a minimum. It should be as clean as possible; as closely directed, tightly controlled as possible. But the stuff we don't need any longer, and shouldn't get involved in, are these actions projects. These - the coups and the para-military things. Because almost in every instance -- if you go back over the record and look at the successes, like Guatemala, which was a success, and you look at it today, in the long term, it turns out to be a disaster.

Action projects usually do not pay off in the long run. You just - you stop something for a short period of time, or you keep a dictator in power for another year or two, or you turn something around for a couple of years. But then it comes back -- it comes back to haunt you.

Well, anyway, that part of intelligence I think, which grew out of World War II, it's -- that kind of stuff should be stopped. And I don't care if the Soviets do it or not. That's no reason why we should do it. The Soviets do a lot of other things, like throw people in concentration camps; and forbid the publication of certain books, and control their society in all sorts of ways. That's no reason that we have to do that.

-7-

VOICE: Do your former colleagues regard this analysis as naïve, or what?

MARCHETTE: Well, it depends on the colleague. Some of my friends agree with me completely. Some would even go further, and some of them are more articulate and more brilliant in their analysis. There are some fellows who think of me as a turncoat, and a kind of defector. Call me nasty names and so forth. But I would say that the -- it just depends on where you're sitting in the agency. And what your commitment is with your own personal involvement as to how they view what a critic -- a former employee who's turned critic has to say.

VOICE: This sort of thing is pretty rare, I take it; that someone who is as high as you were, would be as open in criticising.

MARCHETTE: Yes, it is. And I am very disappointed. I would have thought that by now, more people would have spoken out, but for some strange reason, they don't. I think part of it is the general apathy that -- I guess, as you'd say, concern, you know, for the bank book -- What are you going to do about sending Johnny to college, and how are you going to keep paying the mortgage, and all this. That slows a lot of people down. But the agency has had in the last -- since I left -- have had some pretty interesting little developments.

One is that when the U. S. marched into Cambodia with the Viet Nameese, there were some -- I guess you'd call them demonstrations -- in the agency - some of the younger officers, and most of them on the -- as I understand it -- on the overt side of the house. The analyst types, the academic types, who just didn't think this was proper for the United States government; and certainly didn't want the CIA to have anything to do with it.

The director had to actually hold a meeting in the auditorium to cool these guys off, and give them a good talking to and explain to them that it's like being in the Army, you know, you follow orders. And do what your government tells you to do, and if you can't you get out. I mean, but you've - this is not a private corporation. And one very high-ranking agency officer, got so incensed over the Cambodian thing, that he wrote a letter to the editor of the Washington Post, and signed his name to it. He has since been transferred into the toms in the rather innocuous unimportant type of assignments.

VOICE: Let me ask two other questions. Too often speculated upon. Areas which most people who speculate on them, don't have much first-hand information about.

-8-

What about the famous feud between the FBI and the CIA?  
Is that pretty much accurate as popularly drawn?

MARCHETTE: Yes. I don't know how it's popularly drawn, but as I see it, there always has been competition between the two, obviously. For very good reasons. I mean the CIA was moving into some of the FBI's territory. The most interesting aspect about it, though was that for years the -- while there was some friction from time to time, at the working level -- wherever the two came together -- there were good relations -- pretty good relations -- at the top, between Hoover and the CIA Chief, and there was this fellow Sam Pappish (?) who was the liaison with CIA in Hoover's office.

And they, in fact, as of the time I used to work in the executive suite, one of the pictures the Director had hanging in his office, just as you came in the door, on your right hand side, was a picture of himself, Richard Helms, J. Edgar Hoover, and Sam Pappish, you know. You know, the sign of how good things were. Well, I think what's -- what has re-kindled the feud in the last while back has been the fact that the CIA is, you know, since running out of things to do, since their covered action program has turned out so disastrously over the years -- They're re-trenching there, and they have not been terribly successful in acquiring Soviet agents in the Soviet Union. Their counter-espionage program has not been all that successful.

It's been pretty much a program where you sat back and waited for the defector. Now, they're -- I think they're looking to the counter-espionage people to score some points, and one of the ways to do it, is to become more aggressive and operate against the Soviets in some kind of a offensive fashion.

The CIA has been criticising the FBI's inability to root out Soviet subversion in this country. One quote I remember from this was the -- that the intelligence experts criticise the FBI for only catching four Soviet spies in the last three years. Like, you know, you should be catching them at six a month or something. But anyway, I think the CIA probably interprets a lot of the social unrest in this country, as being in some way manipulated by the Soviet.

Well, anyway, I think they are interested in conducting anti-Soviet operations in this country, which has been the traditional purview of the FBI, and this is one of the reasons why the FBI and the CIA are not hitting it off these days.

VOICE: One other area that's often discussed, and that is the CIA in the State Department. I remember a story, one



ambassador who was regarded as a strong ambassador, having been assured by the CIA people, in his embassy, that he was being apprised of everything they were doing, and finding out, much to his chagrin that the CIA had somebody in deep cover that could have blown and really botched up his job. His efforts at diplomacy and so forth. What is the typical pattern?

MARCHETTE: Well, I'd say the typical pattern is that the ambassador is a wise enough and prudent enough man to know what the score is. And while he - and, therefore, while he wants to know what the agency is doing, he's willing to settle for general awareness of their activities; needing only to know the specifics at certain times. But mainly an assurance that what they're doing, and what he's doing are running parallel, and if it isn't, that he should at least be aware of it. And I think most ambassadors are this way.

VOICE: But there are cables back and forth between the CIA station and Langley, that the ambassador doesn't see.

MARCHETTE: Oh, yeah. Sure. The CIA controls the communications in most of the embassies. Most U. S. diplomatic communications are sent through CIA's channels.

VOICE: So the CIA sees the State Department's, but the State Department doesn't necessarily see the CIA's.

MARCHETTE: That's right. The CIA was so good in the field of communications, and developed such tremendous techniques, that after awhile, the State Department concluded it was just easier to pay the CIA a fee every year, and let them handle communications, and in fact, the CIA had always had a very high-ranking officer attached to the State Department, just for this purpose. I mean, he coordinates the (UNCLEAR) matters.

VOICE: I guess to close, let me ask you this: How would you describe your own politics at this point? In terms of your political view of the world, and of the United States, you're not a Daniel Ellsberg?

MARCHETTE: No.

VOICE: You haven't been radicalized in that sense?

MARCHETTE: No. No, I haven't. But I do think that the United States has got to make some very big changes. And I do think -- not only in its foreign policy; but in its domestic policies. I mean, I think it's a damn shame that we have poverty

-10-

and ghettos, and that we have a race problem, and that we have the drug problems and crime, and prisons -- and I think all these things should be attacked. And should be corrected. And I think these things are far more important to the United States today, than trying to prop up some rinky-dink dictator in some banana republic or in getting all excited because some Marxist is elected President in some country, and threatens to nationalize the copper mines, or something. I just don't think that we should be so damned concerned about whether the Soviets have a thousand or fifteen ICBM's; as long as we have a good deterrent. I mean, that's all you need.

Now, if they're stupid enough to start a war with a good deterrent; they'll be stupid enough to start a war under any conditions. I mean, there's nothing you can do about it.

VOICE: Let me try and make it more precise. With respect to Latin America for example. If the price for turning America's attention to its own problems, and getting out of the dirty tricks business were a succession of socialist countries in Latin America, would that be too high?

MARCHETTE: ... No!

VOICE: ... Price to pay?

MARCHETTE: No, no, no! I mean, never. No, absolutely not. I think those people should be allowed to determine their own future. Just as we should in this country. Now, if they feel that their future lies with socialism, that's their privilege. Even for that matter, if they feel it lies with Communism, that's their privilege. Now, I might get a little goosey if it all --- if everyone one of them switched, you know, to Communism within a twelve-month period, and Soviet troops began showing up all over the place and missile installations, sure! Now that would make me nervous.

But I don't see why any of those countries down there -- and maybe -- in fact, I guess I would say in some instances, it's probably the way things are going to end up, and rightly so. Because the oligarchies down there have been so backward, and so restrictive over the years, that they've even turned the clergy against them now. And the sons of the generals, I understand, in Brazil, are in the movement. Well, damn it to hell, if you run a country that way long enough, this is what's going to happen to you. And in the end, it is the peoples' country, you know.

-11-

VOICE: Former CIA official, Victor Marchette, author of THE ROPE DANCER. This has been Pacifica's Washington Report. This is Bob Cutner (?) reporting.